SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE EDUCATIONAL ATTITUDES OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND PUPILS OF A SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOL

BY

ARDWIN JOSEPH DOLIO

B.E., Northern Illinois State Teachers College, 1939
M.S., University of Illinois, 1946
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AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE EDUCATIONAL ATTITUDES OF PARENTS, TEACHERS AND PUPILS OF A SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOL

Schools have arisen in response to a felt need for a better way of inducting the young into the way of life of the societies in which they are found. Schools have ever been responsive to public opinion. It is only recently, however, that educational workers have begun to feel the need for systematically determining, in any given situation, the status of public opinion regarding the school, and for using such data in their attempt to build good school-community relations.

Public opinion is affected by many factors. The mass media of communication are quite influential in the moulding of opinion. The press, radio, films, and television by their presentation of interpretations of the issues which arise do influence public opinion. Educators must be aware of these influences and of the part they play in moulding opinion if they are to be able to assess correctly the status of public opinion regarding the school. They should not be deluded by the belief that the opinion expressed by the press is the opinion of the public; neither should they minimize the possible effects of the opinions expressed by the press.

Schoolmen should also be aware of the efforts of special interest groups to influence public education and should recognize the fact that the school is constantly exposed to such efforts. They should be aware of the part these groups have played in the past in determining the policies and offerings of the school.

Any educator who wishes to be constantly aware of the status of public opinion regarding the school should find profitable a study of the methods used by the various organizations devoted to the polling of public opinion. The American

Institute of Public Opinion, The Crossley Poll, and the *Fortune* Poll, among others make use of the interview technique in securing a representative sample of respondents. They are able to generalize, within limits, from the responses obtained to the opinions held by the larger population from which the sample is drawn. A study of the polling methods used by the *Literary Digest* and of the consequences which ensued should lead one to be careful of the techniques used.

In addition to the interview technique mentioned earlier, the written questionnaire is often used in determining the opinions and attitudes of the public. In some cases these take the form of attitude scales. Whether one uses the interview technique or the written questionnaire one should realize that each method has some limitations. With either technique the wording of the questions or statements used is of great importance. The meaning of the questions should be clear and the statements should be carefully worded to eliminate bias and emotionally toned words which tend to call forth stereotyped reactions. One should avoid the use of technical words and phrases and avoid suggesting any particular point of view.

Before one can deal intelligently with public opinion the term must be defined. Descriptions of public opinion are many and varied. They range from "...that great compound of folly, weakness, prejudice, wrong feeling, right feeling, obstinacy, and newspaper paragraphs, which is called public opinion,"[1] to "...judgment which is formed and entertained by those who constitute the public."[2] In this study we shall be concerned with three publics of the school—the teachers, parents, and pupils of a selected secondary school. For this study the opinions of these publics will consist of their responses to definitely worded opinion statements and questions. These responses are regarded as verbal expressions of underlying attitudes.

This study was designed to further, in some measure, our

1. Sir Robert Peel as quoted by James Bryce, **The American Commonwealth**, Vol. II, Revised Edition, p. 259. 1910.
2. John Dewey, **The Public and Its Problems**, p. 177. 1927.

knowledge about relationships which may exist between the opinions of parents, teachers, and pupils who responded. The study reports the results of a comparison of the attitudes of teachers toward certain educational issues with those of their pupils and with those of the parents of these pupils for a selected secondary school.

Two surveys have been conducted under the auspices of the Bureau of Research and Service of the College of Education of the University of Illinois which had as their main purpose the assisting of the educational workers of the communities concerned in determining the attitudes of teachers, parents, and pupils toward their school. Out of the methods used and data gathered in the latter of these surveys arises the problem of this study. The question which the study attempts to answer is : When the methods and instruments of this survey are used, are the indicated opinions of teachers distributed similarly to those of responding parents and to those of responding pupils, or are the indicated opinions of the teachers significantly different from those of the other two groups?

The survey which forms the basis for this study was conducted in Streator, Illinois. The populations studied included 43 teachers—the total teaching staff; 863 pupils—84.9% of the total enrollment; and 663 parents representing 44.2% of the families of all pupils.

Three inventories were used—one for parents, another for teachers, and the third for pupils. These inventories were revisions of those used in an earlier survey. The parent and teacher inventories were again pretested before use. Since it was deemed important for the purposes of this study that all three inventories contain a number of items corresponding as closely as possible in terms of wording, content and meaning, the items of the parent inventory were used as a guide. The wording of the corresponding items in the pupil and teacher inventories was varied to fit the groups for which they were designed.

The parent and teacher inventories each consisted of two parts, one dealing primarily with conditions now existing in the school and the second dealing primarily with possible "next steps" in education. The pupil inventory dealt mainly with conditions now existing in the schools. Teachers and parents responded to 42 similar multiple choice situations. Teachers and pupils responded to 28 similar situations.

The pupil inventories were administered during the regular school day over a period of three days. Two pupil home-room groups (a total of approximately fifty pupils) were combined into one unit for each administration of the inventories. Each group was informed about the purpose of the survey, the reasons for responding frankly, and the use which was to be made of the results. Students were assured of anonymity. Directions were read and stressed. As each student completed the inventory he deposited it in a box provided for the purpose and obtained the materials for securing the responses of his parents. This material he sealed in an addressed envelope which was then deposited in another box to be stamped and mailed by the office staff of the school.

Parent inventories were distributed and returned by first-class mail. The packet of materials sent to each family included a covering explanatory letter, one or two copies of the parent inventory, and one or two stamped return envelopes. The number of inventories and return envelopes included was dependent upon the number of parents or guardians with whom the pupil was residing.

The teaching staff completed their inventories immediately following the close of the school day on the first day of the administration of the pupil inventories. Teachers were reminded of an earlier meeting at which time they had expressed unqualified support for the survey and its purposes. Anonymity was guaranteed and their cooperation was again solicited. As each teacher completed the inventory he was free to place it in any order in the accumulated pile of completed inventories and extra copies.

The completed inventories were edited and the responses to some items were coded. The responses of each individual were transferred from the inventory to an International Business Machine card. The tabulation of responses was accomplished by means of an International Business Machine counting sorter.

The responses of all responding parents, all teachers, and all responding pupils to each item were tabulated. The responses of teachers were compared with those of the parents and those of the pupils by means of the chi square test of homogeneity. Whenever chi square was of such magnitude that the probability that it would be exceeded by two random samples of a single population was .05 or less, the hypothesis of homogeneity was rejected and the two groups compared were said to differ significantly in their attitudes. Whenever the probability was greater than .05 the evidence was considered insufficient to reject the hypothesis of homogeneity and was considered to indicate that the two groups seemed to hold fairly similar opinions regarding the issue in question.

On those issues for which no significant difference was found between the opinions of all teachers and those of all responding parents or all responding pupils, a further analysis of the responses was made. The responses of all teachers were compared with those of pupil or parent subgroups. Pupil subgroups were based on sex and on grade level. Parent subgroups were formed by classifying parents according to age, sex, highest school grade completed, and (for males only) occupation.

The opinions of all responding pupils differed significantly from those of all teachers on 10 of the 23 items for which their responses were compared. Responding parents differed significantly from teachers on 14 of the same 23 items. This leads one to conclude that more heterogeneity seems to exist between the opinions of responding parents and those of teachers than between the opinions of teachers and those of responding pupils. On most items for which differences were noted be-

tween the opinions of pupils and teachers, pupils seemed to be more critical of the school than were the teachers. On the other hand, when differences were found between teachers and parents, the parents usually had rated the school more highly than had the teachers. From this one might conclude that the differences found between teachers and pupils may be more serious from the standpoint of the smooth functioning of the school than those found between parents and teachers.

We could not reject the hypothesis of homogeneity of the opinions of all teachers and all responding pupils for the following issues:

1) *How many of the teachers know the pupils well enough?* Only the freshmen differed significantly from the teachers in their opinions. Freshmen more than teachers felt that all or most of their teachers knew them well enough.

2) *Satisfaction with the way pupils are treated by the staff.* More than 60% of each group was satisfied. The apparent similarity held for all pupil subgroups here investigated.

3) *How often are pupils treated fairly by the staff?* More than 75% of each group felt this was usually or always the case. The apparent similarity held for each pupil subgroup here investigated.

4) *Do differences in discipline among teachers keep the pupils from profiting as much as they could from their schoolwork?* Of those who gave an opinion more of each group answered affirmatively than answered negatively. The apparent similarity held for each pupil subgroup here investigated.

5) *How many of the teachers really seem to care about each child as a person needing individual understanding and attention?* Only the sophomores differed significantly from teachers. They were somewhat more critical of the teachers in this regard than were the teachers themselves.

6) *How often do the pupils treat one another fairly and kindly?* A large majorityof each group felt this was usually or always the case. The opinions of girls and of seniors differed

significantly from those of teachers. Each of these groups was somewhat more critical of the frequency of fair treatment than were the teachers.

7) *How much help does the school give the pupils in solving their personal problems?* The opinion of girls and of freshmen were significantly different from those of teachers. Both groups were somewhat less critical of the help given than were the teachers.

8) *How much of what the pupils are studying will be useful?* More than 60% of each group felt that most or everything being studied would be useful. The attitudes of juniors and seniors were significantly different from those of teachers. While more than half of each of these groups felt that most or everything being studied would be useful, they were somewhat more critical than were the teachers.

9) *Do the pupils participate in as many student activities as they should?* The largest proportion of each group answered affirmatively. The apparent similarity held for each pupil subgroup here investigated.

10) *Amount of money pupils are asked to bring to school.* The largest proportion of each group felt that pupils were asked to bring too much money. The apparent similarity held for each pupil subgroup here investigated.

11) *Does the school have as much equipment as it needs?* More than 80% of each group felt that the school had most or everything needed.

12) *Is the school overcrowded?* More than two-thirds of each group felt that the school was not overcrowded. The apparent similarity held for each pupil subgroup here investigated.

13) *Is the school kept clean?* More than 80% of each group felt that the school was usually or always kept clean. The apparent similarity held for each pupil subgroup here investigated.

We could not reject the hypothesis of homogeneity for the opinions of all teachers and all responding parents for the following issues:

1) *General satisfaction with the school.* More than 75% of each group expressed satisfaction. The apparent similarity held for each parent subgroup here investigated.

2) *How often are the pupils treated fairly by the staff?* More than 80% of each group felt this was usually or always the case. The apparent similarity held for each parent subgroup here investigated.

3) *How many of the teachers really seem to care about each child as a person needing individual understanding and attention?* Of those who expressed an opinion, more than half of each group felt that most or all of the teachers held such an attitude toward the pupils. The apparent similarity held for each parent subgroup here investigated.

4) *How often do the pupils treat one another fairly and kindly?* More than 70% of each group felt this was usually or always the case. The apparent similarity held for each parent subgroup here investigated.

5) *How much of what the pupils are studying will be useful?* More than 70% of each group felt that most or everything that the pupils were studying would be useful. The apparent similarity held for each parent subgroup here investigated.

6) *Are pupils with little money to spend "left out" of parts of the school program?* The responses of each group were fairly evenly divided between yes, no, and uncertain. The apparent similarity held for each parent subgroup here investigated.

7) *Does the school have as much equipment as it needs?* More than 80% of each group felt that the school had most or everything it needed. The apparent similarity held for each parent subgroup here investigated.

8) *Is the school overcrowded?* A majority of each group

felt that the school was not overcrowded. Parents whose formal education ceased during the high school years differed significantly from teachers. This group, more than the teachers, felt that the school was somewhat overcrowded.

9) *Is the school kept clean?* More than 80% of each group felt that the school was usually or always kept clean. The apparent similarity held each parent subgroup here investigated.

10) *Do parents and teachers know each other well enough?* A majority of each group answered negatively. Parents who had attended college and male parents whose occupation was professional, semi-professional, proprietorial, managerial, or official in nature differed significantly from teachers. Although in each case a majority answered negatively, the proportion of each of these parent groups responding affirmatively was considerably larger than that found in the teacher group.

11) *Does the school keep the parents adequately informed regarding its work?* A majority of each group felt the school was doing a good job of keeping the parents informed. The apparent similarity held for each parent subgroup here investigated.

12) *Spending tax money to pay for kindergartens and nursery schools.* When the favor-oppose classification of responses was studied the opinions of parents who had attended college; of all male parents; of male parents who were in professional, semi-professional, proprietorial, managerial, or official occupations; and of male farmers were significantly different from those of teachers. While the proportion of each group favoring such a use of tax money was larger than one-half, these parent groups were somewhat more opposed than were the teachers.

13) *Spending tax money to pay for evening schools.* More than 60% of each group favored such a practice. Regardless of the method of classifying responses (i.e., favor-oppose or favor-all others responding), the apparent similarity held for

all parent subgroups except male farmers. Slightly less than half of this group favored such spending.

14) *Should taxes be increased or school services cut?* More than 55% of each group favored increase in taxes should a choice become necessary. When the favor-oppose classification of responses was used, the apparent similarity held for each parent subgroup here investigated. When the favor-all others responding classification of responses was used, the opinions of teachers were significantly different from those of parents.

15) *Federal aid to education.* More than 70% of each group favored federal aid. The apparent similarity held for all parent subgroups except male parents in professional, semi-professional, proprietorial, managerial, and official occupations when the yes-no classification of responses was considered. A larger proportion of this parent group than of the teachers was opposed to federal aid. When the yes-all others responding classification was used, parents and teachers differed significantly.

16) *Should the school board be representative of the interests of all people in the community?* More than 70% of each group replied affirmatively. The apparent similarity held for each parent subgroup here investigated.

17) *Spending tax money for a statewide system of junior colleges.* More than 50% of each group favored such spending. The apparent similarity held for each parent subgroup here investigated.

The hypothesis of the homogeneity of the opinions of teachers and all responding pupils was rejected for the following issues:

1) *General satisfaction with the school.* While more than half of the pupils expressed definite satisfaction with the school, the pupil group as a whole was considerably less satisfied than were the teachers.

2) *How many of the teachers are too changeable in their discipline?* About 75% of each group felt that half or fewer

of the teachers were too changeable in their discipline. Pupils were somewhat more critical than were the teachers.

3) *Strictness of discipline.* Pupils more than teachers felt that the discipline was too strict. However, more than two-thirds of the pupils felt that the discipline was about right.

4) *How much help do the teachers give the pupils with their schoolwork?* While more than 75% of each group felt pupils received all or most of the help needed, pupils were more critical of the amount of help given than were the teachers.

5) *How much time do pupils spend on homework each school day?* Teachers more than pupils felt that pupils spent too little time on homework.

6) *Should the school try to help pupils with their personal problems?* More than half of each group felt the school should try to help pupils in this area. Teachers far more than pupils felt this to be the case.

7) *Are there things pupils should be learning now which are not being taught in school?* Pupils far more than teachers felt there were no such things.

8) *How much are the pupils getting out of their schoolwork?* Teacher estimates were somewhat lower than pupil estimates in this regard. About 9% of the teachers as compared with about 29% of the pupils felt that the pupils were getting about all that one could reasonably expect from their schoolwork.

9) *Amount of work required of students in order to "keep up" in their studies.* Teachers more than pupils felt that too little work was required.

10) *Are pupils who have little money to spend "left out" of parts of the school program?* Almost two-thirds of the pupils as compared with about two-fifths of the teachers felt this to be the case.

The hypothesis of the homogeneity of the opinions of teachers and all responding parents was rejected for the following issues:

1) *How many of the teachers know their pupils well enough?* Parents more than teachers felt that all or most of the teachers knew the pupils well enough.

2) *Satisfaction with the way pupils are treated by the staff.* Parents more than teachers expressed satisfaction with the way pupils were treated.

3) *How many of the teachers are too changeable in their discipline?* Teachers more than parents felt that half or fewer of the teachers were too changeable in their discipline.

4) *Do differences in discipline among teachers keep the pupils from profiting as much as they could from their schoolwork?* Teachers more than parents felt this to be the case.

5) *Strictness of discipline.* Teachers more than parents felt that the discipline was not strict enough.

6) *How much help do the teachers give the pupils with their schoolwork?* Teachers more than parents felt that the teachers gave the students all or most of the help needed.

7) *How much time do the pupils spend on homework each school day?* Teachers more than parents felt that the pupils spent too little time on homework.

8) *Should the school try to help pupils with their personal problems?* Teachers more than parents felt this to be the case.

9) *How much help does the school give the pupils in solving their personal problems?* Parents more than teachers felt that the school gave the pupils all or a considerable amount of the help needed.

10) *Are there things the pupils should be learning now which are not being taught in school?* Teachers more than parents felt this to be the case.

11) *How much are the pupils getting out of their school-*

work? About 64% of the parents as compared with 9% of the teachers felt that the pupils were getting about all that one could reasonably expect from their schoolwork.

12) *Amount of work students are required to do in order to "keep up" in their studies.* Teachers more than parents felt that too little work was required.

13) *Do the pupils participate in as many student activities as they should?* Teachers more than parents felt that pupils participated in fewer activities than they should.

14) *Amount of money pupils are asked to bring to school.* Teachers more than parents felt that pupils were asked to bring too much money.

15) *Is the school board representative?* Parents more than teachers felt that the school board was representative of all the major interests of the community.

16) *Adequacy of teachers' salaries.* Teachers more than parents tended to feel that teachers were paid too little for the amount of work they were expcted to do.

The conclusions reached in this study hold only for the persons from whom usable inventories were received and for such other groups for which these samples may be considered representative. The general conclusion to be reached from this study is that it is not apparent that the opinions and attitudes of the teacher group here studied are similar on all issues to those of pupils or those of parents who returned completed inventories. The evidence from this particular school system seems to indicate that there is no reason for the administrator to discard the use of the parent and pupil inventories even though his main purpose is simply that of securing information regarding the attitudes of these groups toward the school rather than the larger purpose of securing the participation of all groups in thought and discussion regarding the organization and operation of the school.

VITA

Ardwin Joseph Dolio was born on May 17, 1917 at South Wilmington, Illinois. He attended the public grade and high schools at Marseilles, Illinois, and was graduated from Marseilles High School on May 31, 1934. He is a graduate of Northern Illinois State Teachers College, having been awarded the degree of Bachelor of Education in 1939. Following this he was a teacher of mathematics in Marseilles High School from September of 1939 until June of 1943. On July 10, 1943, he reported for active duty with the United States Navy. From this date he served as an instructor in aerial navigation and aerology at U.S. Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas; at U.S. Naval Air Station, Ottumwa, Iowa; and at U.S. Naval Preflight School, St. Mary's, California. He was returned to inactive duty with the United States Naval Reserve on February 19, 1946 with the rank of Lieutenant (junior grade). From April 1, 1946 to September 1, 1946 he served as a teacher of mathematics at University High School, University of Illinois. From September 1, 1946 until September 1, 1947 he served as Research Assistant in the Bureau of Educational Research of the College of Education of the University of Illinois. From September 1, 1947 to June 30, 1948, he served as an Instructor in Education at the University of Illinois.